

MEMORANDUM

TO: Superintendents and Principals

FROM: Dr. Tony Bennett, Superintendent of Public Instruction

DATE: May 29, 2009

RE: ISTEP+ Review Process

Following receipt of a significant number of concerns raised by you and your staffs regarding the open-ended portion of the spring ISTEP+ exam, I directed my staff to immediately conduct a comprehensive review of the test itself and the process leading up to it. You will recall that this review included analyses by my staff, our testing vendor, more than 160 teachers categorized by content area and grade level, and an independent expert.

Below please find a summary of the results of this review, which is substantially complete, and a list of the actions that I have instructed the Indiana Department of Education (the “Department”) to take as a result. In constructing these results, Department staff used a conservative approach, closely scrutinizing all questions that (a) failed to be determined aligned by at least 80% of teachers reviewing the item; (b) were flagged as concerns by the independent expert (even though, in some cases, reviewing teachers determined that the item was appropriately aligned); and (c) otherwise posed concerns to Department experts.

Summary of Results

- Out of 1,455 total testing items reviewed, 35 items were found to be substantially out of alignment with the associated standard. A summary by grade level and content area is attached, but below are the highlights of these results:
 - Twenty-five of these items were open-ended items and the remaining 10 were multiple choice.
 - Three of these items were operational, meaning that they would have been included in the scoring for this year’s exam, and the remaining 32 items were being piloted for use in future exams.
 - Across all grade levels, 20 of these items were found in the math content area, 8 were in social studies, 5 were in science and 2 were in English/language arts.
 - Fourteen of these items were in the grade 7 exam, 12 were in grade 4, 4 were in grade 6, 3 were in grade 5 and 2 were in grade 3.

- Consistent with concerns raised by the field, the most significantly impacted test was grade 4 math, with 7 open-ended items and 2 multiple choice items out of alignment.
- An additional 37 items that did align at the standard level were determined by the teachers to align to a different indicator under that standard.
- Through the scoring process, our vendor will provide to the Department an analysis of the impact of timing on student performance. This data will be used to set the testing times for the spring 2010 test. Item specific teacher comments were collected and are being reviewed to refine the limits and specifications provided in the construction of new items.
- Additionally, while the Department communicated repeatedly with test coordinators regarding the changes that were being implemented for the spring exam, it did not ensure that these communications were driven to the most important audience, the classroom teacher.

Responsive Action

- The three operational items that were identified as being substantially out of alignment will be suppressed. Scores for these items will not be included in overall results.
- The 32 pilot items that were identified as being substantially out of alignment will be removed from the item pool. Some may be rewritten or targeted at a different grade level and piloted again, but none will be used in their current form.
- Thirty-seven items that posed less significant alignment concerns will be realigned to the appropriate indicator.
- The pacing of the exam will be changed based on the analysis of actual student performance on the spring 2009 test.
- While continuing to rely on the test coordinators as the target audience for most communications, to the extent that the Department is undertaking substantial changes to any exam in the future, it will target communications to administrators and classroom teachers as well.

Although across all grade levels and four separate content areas, less than 2.5% of questions were determined to be substantially out of alignment, I and my staff understand the tolerance for error in high stakes testing is zero. I share your disappointment that even a single item was out of alignment, but am gratified that the responsive action will be swift and significant and, most notably, that student scores will not be affected as a result of the misaligned items.